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COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN
Forty-first session
10-21 March 1997
Agenda item 7

ADOPTION OF THE REPORT OF THE COMMISSION ON ITS FORTY-FIRST SESSION

Draft report

Addendum

Rapporteur: Sweeya SANTIPITAKS (Thailand)

Moderator's summary of the panel discussion and dialogue on the critical area of concern: women and the economy

1. The Beijing Platform for Action,[1] proposed actions for women as workers, self-employed women, entrepreneurs and managers. It examined the effects of economic policies and restructuring on women, women's access to economic decision-making, women's unpaid work, and the need to balance work and family responsibilities, as well as the importance of mainstreaming a gender perspective in economic policies and programmes.

Women's participation in economic decision-making

2. While noting that women were involved in economic decision-making to some degree at various levels, it was stressed that actions needed to be taken to enable women to participate even more fully at all levels of economic decision-making, including the household level where experience had shown that women's decisions tended to contribute to the well-being of the household as a whole. Very few women were found in decision-making positions in international financial institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), in the World Trade Organization or in transnational corporations. Nor were women well represented in economic decision-making at the national level, in academia, in banks and in private companies. Women were for the most

part poorly represented in trade unions, chambers of commerce and industry associations. Their participation in such bodies was essential.

3. Legal instruments alone would not automatically lead to better representation of women in economic decision-making. Policy instruments to improve women's position in those sectors and levels of the economy where they were under-represented were required. Education, training and network-building were crucial to shaping women's and men's attitudes and expectations with respect to women's role in economic decision-making.

Women entrepreneurs

4. Women-owned microenterprises and small and medium-sized enterprises had increasingly become a source of employment, growth and innovation. For example, women employers tended to recruit other women and were family-friendly. However, women entrepreneurs, notably in developing, developed and transition economies, faced serious constraints related to the legal and institutional framework in which they had to operate, as well as to the lack of training, support services and credit. A major challenge for women-owned enterprises was to access these services and to grow from micro- to small and medium-sized enterprises.

5. The importance for support services for women entrepreneurs in areas such as technical assistance, creation of networks, business planning and financial counselling was highlighted. Marketing techniques and access to markets were recognized as areas where women's business needed support for further growth.

6. Credit was considered a crucial requirement for women entrepreneurs. Wnere micro-financing schemes had been in existence for a long time, there was a high-payback record for women. Notably, since the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action, an even stronger emphasis had been placed on credit as an instrument for empowering women in the economy. Traditional savings schemes were also being used, especially by poor women as an alternative to formal financial systems. There should be an effort to ensure that special credit and savings schemes for women did not lead to their further marginalization. The need for preferential treatment of women in the provision of credit and for simplifying procedures for access to credit was highlighted. The achievements of the Grameen Bank which provides micro-credit for a largely female clientele were noted.

7. It was noted that women entrepreneurs had benefited from creating regional and international networks to expand markets and share experience.

Women in rural areas

8. The economic situation of women living in rural areas was given special attention. There was a critical need to increase their productivity through, inter alia, the introduction of technology, including for the reduction of household chores. Men frequently controlled the intermediary distribution of products produced by women, limiting women's benefits from their own production.

9. More and more rural women were expressing the need for credit and information, but they often lacked the networks and access to information and credit. On the positive side, it was noted that, in some countries, land policies and property laws were being revised to women's benefit, and that a percentage of development assistance resources was being earmarked in some places to support credit schemes for rural women.

Women in management

10. Breaking the glass ceiling that impeded women's access to top management positions as well as avoiding the "sticky floors" on the lower levels of the labour market was critical for the advancement of women and for the mainstreaming of a gender perspective. A critical mass of 30 per cent women in top management positions was considered crucial.

11. Equal-opportunity laws and existing International Labour Organization (ILO) standards for equality in employment were not sufficient to address gender discrimination in the labour market, especially at top decision-making levels. To increase women's participation in top management, a number of measures had been successful, including adoption of anti-discriminatory laws, introduction of changes in corporate practices, teaching aides for consciousness-raising, monitoring schemes and monitoring of employment practices. Commitment at the top was vital for changing the organizational culture and for placing women in management positions. Equal access to education, vocational training and enterprise-level training were important tools for qualifying women for top management positions.

12. Employers' organizations had played an important role in influencing attitudes and in making a business case for women in top management in some countries. Trade unions should also play a role by pushing for implementation and by monitoring legislation and equal-opportunity policies.

Women in the labour force

13. Women's employment was central to the achievement of equality between women and men, and women's access to education played an important role in access to work opportunities. It was noted that empowering women in the labour force could help in the empowerment of women in other spheres of life, including the household, provided that a balance between family and work could be achieved. Arrangements to facilitate the reconciliation of work and family responsibilities were urgently needed. Notably, where parental leave policies and flexible hours were available to both women and men, the situation had improved.

14. The unequal distribution between women and men of unpaid work was noted. The tendency for women to be employed in low-wage industries and the necessity for looking into the minimum-wage level were discussed. Better sharing of paid and unpaid work between women and men was required. While unpaid work was recognized as important by Governments, few efforts had been made to develop

methodologies to measure such work, yet its measurement was necessary in order for society to recognize women's full contribution to the economy.

15. In most cases, the current challenge for policy makers, employers, trade unions and women workers was to achieve a balance between more jobs and more quality jobs in the labour market. It was noted that atypical forms of employment were leading to a growing feminization of poverty, especially among older women.

16. Concern was expressed regarding the efficiency of legislative tools, including equal-opportunity and non-discriminatory laws, in redressing gender discrimination in the labour market. Gender-neutral policies, such as equal employment opportunity laws, were not sufficient in this regard. Legislative tools needed to be accompanied by enforcement mechanisms and publicity generated about businesses that violated anti-discrimination laws. Special protective measures for women were seen to have both positive and adverse effects and in some countries protective measures for women were being abolished.

17. To overcome occupational segregation, many projects and programmes were being developed to broaden the fields studied by women. A strong focus was being given to education and training in technology as well as in new growth industries and sectors. Other measures such as fellowships and child-care arrangements had been promoted to facilitate women's access to academic institutions.

18. It was noted that occupational segregation contributed to the wage gap between women and men. In order to enforce the principle of equal pay for work of equal value, policies should include effective legislation, transparency of women's and men's wages, changing of stereotyped choices of women and men, and effective guidance for employers. Instruments were being developed to compare wages for female-dominated and male-dominated occupations. Schemes for work evaluation had been suggested to facilitate this process.

19. Transnational corporations applied double standards by implementing different equal-opportunity standards in wages and working conditions abroad from those supported in their own countries, largely to the detriment of women employees.

20. The role that non-governmental organizations played in monitoring working conditions for women and abuses in the labour market was stressed.

Globalization and structural adjustment

21. While it was recognized that an enabling environment for women's participation in the economy was required at the national level, it was also noted that the international level should not be overlooked because of its impact on women and the national economic situation.

22. The responsibility of Governments and international financial institutions to ensure that women were not disproportionately discriminated against in situations of structural change and economic recession was emphasized.

Structural adjustment had increased the total amount of women's work and had reduced access to basic services and resources. Economic liberalization policies should be evaluated in relation to their impact on women, and global efforts were required to cancel or reduce the debt owed by developing countries. Structural adjustment policies and other economic policies were still being applied as if they were gender-neutral. The impact of structural adjustment policies on women in particular should be monitored and assessed.

23. The need for regular and substantive dialogue between the United Nations and the Bretton Woods institutions and the World Trade Organization, to coordinate assistance aimed at strengthening programmes for the benefit of women and their families, was called for. Such coordination was especially important at the field level.

Notes

[1] Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 4-15 September 1995 (A/CONF.177/20 and Add.1), chap. I, resolution 1, annex II.

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Addendum

Rapporteur: Sweeya SANTIPITAKS (Thailand)

Moderator's summary of the panel discussion and dialogue on education and training of women

1. The Beijing Platform for Action recognized the central role of education for the advancement of women and the numerous benefits yielded for development and the empowerment of women. Education and training were necessities for the full and equal participation of women at all levels of decision-making and in shaping the future of their communities.

2. Education was a constitutional right in many countries, but the full enjoyment of this right remained restricted for many citizens, in particular girls and women. To implement the World Declaration on Education for All and the Framework for Action to Meet Basic Learning Needs, adopted by the World Conference on Education for All (Jomtien, Thailand, 1990), mobilization of all for education was needed. In many countries, various initiatives, including at the highest political level, had been taken to reach those goals and implement commitments to education made at the Fourth World Conference on Women. To ensure equal access for all to education, a joint effort of Governments and society in general was considered a necessity, starting from early childhood onwards. The essential role and responsibility of the State in providing access for all to quality education was confirmed. However, it was emphasized that in line with decentralization efforts, the role of regional and local institutions as well as non-governmental organizations and the private sector had gained importance. While some requested an improvement in quality in public rather

than private schools, maintaining free public education at the primary level, others favoured a more liberal policy environment with competition between the private and public sector. A new alignment between academia and non-governmental organizations would contribute to the type of action needed, based on mutual benefit and synergy. Important examples of successful networking at the national and regional levels were mentioned.

3. Women still accounted for the majority of the world's adult illiterates. These numbers had been steadily increasing owing to rapid population growth in some subregions. A strong plea was made for the eradication of illiteracy and the attainment of the goals defined in the Platform for Action; that is, reduction of the female illiteracy rate to at least half its 1990 level. Successful literacy campaigns were being carried out in many countries jointly by government and non-governmental organizations and with the active support of the media. As illiteracy and poverty were closely linked, successful literacy campaigns should include technical training and training for income-generation as well as information on health and citizenship.

4. It was acknowledged that general and basic education was fundamental and provided the foundation for further education and training. Completion by all children of high-quality primary and lower secondary schooling and the provision of remedial general education to adults, while not sufficient, would make a more lasting contribution to equalization than any policy measure concerning higher education or training alone.

5. A number of obstacles continued to discriminate against girls' access to education, such as customary attitudes, inadequate and gender-biased teaching and educational materials, sexual harassment and lack of adequate schooling facilities. As a result, girls in some subregions performed poorly, repeated grades frequently and had higher drop-out rates than boys. It was reported that the main reason for girls dropping out was their obligation to perform household duties, early marriages and early pregnancies.

6. In countries in transition, specific training and retraining of women and adaptation of training to the changing needs of the labour market were needed and considered essential for ensuring women's employability.

7. Girls and women in especially difficult circumstances and with special needs faced discrimination in terms of access to education and availability of training materials and support systems. A favourable learning environment that responded to special needs would enhance educational performance. It was noted that new technologies opened up new avenues for training students with disabilities.

8. To improve access and retention of girls in schools, a number of actions had been taken. The recruitment of more female teachers reduced the fear of sexual harassment and at the same time provided role models for girls. Programmes of open education or mobile schools had proved successful, especially in remote rural areas or for certain populations such as ethnic minorities or nomadic groups. In many developing countries, support mechanisms included the development of new technologies that eased the burden of household work of girls and women. The influence of parents, in particular mothers, on girls' education

was recognized, and various initiatives had been taken to involve them in the process. School feeding programmes were another measure to improve the retention of girls in schools. Mentoring programmes provided girls with positive role models and enhanced their motivation and self-esteem. In some countries, provisions were in place to transfer pregnant schoolgirls to other schools where teachers had been sensitized so as to reduce drop-out rates. There was a strong plea to reinforce sports and physical education, especially for girls and women.

9. Gender analysis in education and training was a basis for further analysis, and comprehensive, innovative proposals for policy-making. The mainstreaming of gender concerns included the removal of bias from school materials and teacher training, the introduction of gender-sensitive educational materials at all levels, especially in mathematics, in science and technology and in the development of curricula; the advancement of gender studies; and the establishment of a post of gender ombudsman. It also included the promotion of more women into decision-making positions in educational institutions. Non-discriminatory education benefited both girls and boys and thus ultimately contributed to equality between women and men.

10. To be effective, vocational training of women had to be linked to the labour market, or women would continue to face constraints and unequal opportunities. Women's employability was the key to access to both employment and self-employment opportunities. Persistent job segregation originated in the educational choices of men and women as regards fields of study and specialization. Initiatives to bring women into non-traditional fields had had some success. A redesigned and up-to-date labour market information system was needed. More women should enter the expanding field of new information technology. To enable women to participate in training or retraining schemes, support systems, including child care, were needed.

11. Only a minority of women entered and succeeded in the field of science and technology. A number of initiatives had been taken to make such fields accessible to girls and women and to develop their creative potential. These initiatives included the development of specific projects for women, incentives such as competitions and rewards, scientific meetings, travelling exhibitions and the provision of science equipment for girls. Public recognition of and information on famous women scientists as potential role models would be beneficial. The necessity of enhancing the motivation of girls to continue higher education and to reach for positions in decision-making in the scientific field was stressed. Psycho-social factors played an important role in changing the attitude of girls and their parents towards such choices.

12. In a time of rapid change in knowledge, societal norms and technology, education and training by necessity became a lifelong process. For women, lifelong education was still a means to gain basic knowledge, including literacy, and for breaking the cycle of poverty. Lifelong learning included education for citizenship and democracy, legal literacy, access to information and informed choice of information. Distance learning and the use of new communication technologies in adult education benefited women, who often struggled against lack of mobility, time and financial constraints. The precondition for successful adult education was that women would recognize its

value. Any form of adult education required a favourable or facilitating environment and should be developed in a participatory process involving all actors. The first steps had been taken in some countries to create a universally accessible lifelong education system with flexibility that would allow the transfer of transcripts from different establishments and recognition of credits and would hence benefit women greatly.

13. The trend to reduce educational budgets, which were also affected by increased demand due to population growth in many countries and structural adjustment measures, had a negative impact on educational systems, particularly for girls. More strategic planning of resources in the field of education was required, including sufficient allotments to primary education, as well as the reallocation of funds from other sectors, such as military spending, to education. In this respect, the 20/20 concept as accepted in the World Summit for Social Development and reinforced in the Platform for Action was recalled. The international community and international organizations were requested to support national initiatives and implementation of the targets set in the Platform for Action, including the agreed target of 0.7 per cent of the gross national product of developed countries for overall official development assistance.